

MACHINE AGE

Virtually Selfless

News Flash: There Is Life After Shopping

BY JASON SCHWARTZBERG & MARK SCHOOPS

WALL STREET BONUSES—JUST THE BONUSES—WILL TOP \$13 BILLION THIS YEAR, ACCORDING TO LAST WEEK'S 'NEW YORK TIMES.' AS AMERICANS SPEND AND SPEND AND SPEND, AND RECORD NUMBERS OF MIDDLE-CLASS FOLKS HEAD INTO DEBT AND BANKRUPTCY, ONE EXPERT SAID HE'D EXPECTED PEOPLE WOULD MAX OUT AT 'A CERTAIN LIMIT OF THEIR CONSUMPTION.' PLEASE. BUT THIS COUNTRY'S SAVING

grace was always that its citizens were generous, taking a cue from Rockefeller and casting dimes to the poor. History. Now, giving to the poor has dropped. While the poor get poorer—not because they're unemployed but because they can't survive on what their jobs pay them—fewer American households are giving anything to charity, and those that do are writing smaller checks.

Which is why The Hunger Site makes a great home page. Even if you're one of those Americans who have spent themselves into debt, you can still give, just by going to www.thehungersite.com and clicking. You don't even have to pay, because the site's advertisers

foot the bill, giving the United Nations World Food Programme a day's worth of rice or maize for each click. Yep, you can give without giving. It's perfect for the zeitgeist.

The World Food Programme feeds 75 million people in 80 countries and last year delivered more than 2.8 million tons of food. Started by a 42-year-old computer programmer from Bloomington, Indiana, named John Breen, The Hunger Site is now generating a million cups of donated food each day. Every penny from the advertisers goes to the food; administrative costs are not paid by Hunger Site advertisers (and more than 90 percent of WFP money already goes to food). Currently, Hunger Site money is being used to feed schoolchildren in Ethiopia.

The only catch is that you can click only once a day on The Hunger Site—and remembering to go to the page may be more than most frazzled New Yorkers can handle. That's why it works as a home page. Seeing the site every time you log on infuses a little Zen into our out-of-control materialist world. As the page reminds you, someone starves to death every 3.6 seconds—three-quarters of them children—and a poor country on the map goes black to represent these deaths. Count your blessings.

And oppose our national stinginess. According to a recent special report in *The Washington Post*, the United States is giving less humanitarian aid to poor countries than at any time in history. In fact, America is now giving a smaller fraction of its wealth than *any* donor nation, despite our booming economy.

Will The Hunger Site solve the world's problems? No. Isn't it better to teach people to fish than just give them fish? Yes. But you know what? It helps—when people are starving. Big Questions don't matter. And if you want to tackle the larger problems, you can. Here are some Web sites that help.

» www.helping.org

AOL's clearinghouse for more than 600,000 charities doing every conceivable kind of work. You can search by your zip code to find organizations working in your area—or in an area you know needs help. In many cases, you can make donations over the Web. The only cost the AOL foundation doesn't cover is the credit card transaction fee.

» www.charitycounts.com

Similar to, though much smaller than, AOL's helping.org, this New York-based site connects you to charities and allows you to shop at the Charity Mall, where a window above each retailer's site indicates the exact percentage donated to charity. They also take a commission on sales, but for donations they take only the cost of the transaction.

» www.givetocharity.com

Allows you to donate, but skims off an administrative fee of up to 15 percent.

» www.fxb.org

Named for a helicopter pilot who died while flying a rescue mission in West Africa, the Association François-Xavier Bagnoud operates over two dozen programs worldwide, all aimed at improving the lives of children orphaned by AIDS. You can contribute online.

» www.greatergood.com

Donates 5 to 15 percent of every purchase to the charity of your choice.

» www.iGive.com and www.4charity.com

More charity shopping, in which a fraction of your purchase goes to a nonprofit that you choose. □



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